

GETTING THERE IS HALF THE PUN

“Selected Shorts” from 17 Years of Wordplay Articles

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This is the final print issue of *Word Ways*, marking half a century of publication. The magazine will continue, online, beginning in 2018. I haven't written for its pages for all 50 years, but I've contributed to every quarterly issue since February of 2001. That's 68 feature articles, plus occasional book reviews, filler items, and responses to other writers.

The occasion struck me as an appropriate time for a chrestomathy of the presumed best of my work—original puns and other wordplay organized by genre. To save space, I have eschewed specimens that require shaggy-dog stories or other lengthy setups.

First, however, on the tricky question of originality: As I write, I routinely do Internet searches. When I discover that my idea was anticipated, I either list it as such, attribute if the creator is known, or omit. But independent creation is a common phenomenon, and even Google doesn't know everything. So it's tough to be certain if, for example, that great quip about blockchain technology wasn't really invented by Bernard of Clarivaux, the twelfth-century theologian.

Thus, it might be said that every punster is a credit to his race—and in a race to his credit! But as far as I could determine at the time, the following are original.

Puns. Mt. Olympus bachelor auction: *God for bid*. Oversized baguettes: *Procrustean bread*. Controversy about natural pain relief: *Endorphins of the storm*. Clarion call for cryogenic preservation: *If this be freezin', make the most of it!* Important Warhol exhibition: *Kitschy coup*. The Ten Commandments: *Chock Full o' Nots*. Search-engine theme song: *I Got Algorithm*. Disregarding the most important point: *Substance abuse*. On people who habitually make malicious and cutting remarks: *A tiger cannot change its swipes*. Logicians' convention: *A site for sorites*. Remedy for travelers' diarrhea: *Turista Traction*. Remembrance of Halloweens past: *Nostalgie de la "boo!"* Resolution to refrain from nagging: *Pester sequester*. Shopping for corduroys: *Save the wide wales!*

Spoonerisms and transpositions. A specialty, and the subject of my first book. Drawn from 16 articles: Caveat for baristas: *Heed the foamless!* Off-campus dive bar: *A pit without townie*. When we honor those courageous St. Bernards: *Hound Grog Day*. End of summer vacation: *One sighs; it's fall*. Sign at the S&M café: *Please Say When Perved*. Popular reading matter: *Food labels and lewd fables*. Contest for best-behaved child: *America's Tot, Gallant*. Management dictum: *Don't change the channel; channel the change*. Lament of Caucasian rappers: *Fie! We white!* New Year's Eve in New Orleans: *Bopping the Drawl*. Farmer encounters zombies: *I Feel the Feet Move Under my Earth*. Homer Simpson on learning of Chamberlain's appeasement of Hitler: *Better the Neville you—d'oh!* Weak cell signal: *No service—so nervous*. Slogan for aphrodisiac: *Hail, more moans!* Omertà: *Oral mobligation*.

Mixed metaphors. In nine compilations of unintentional examples I found in the media, I cited such gems as: “The strength of our country is the fabric of our melting pot” and “We have the home run in the back pocket.” As humorous lagniappe, to bracket the real mixed metaphors, I created a few of my own: “I won’t attempt to sugarcoat these lead balloons.” “It’s just the ticket to whet your appetite.” “At the end of the day, there’s no silver bullet.”

Redundancies. Using a similar template, I cited inadvertent tautologies (*actual truth, new innovation*), and devised my own amusing specimens, a genre I dubbed “redun-dances”: *It’s strange yet bizarre. That’s not only costly but also expensive. Chance—or coincidence?*

Acronyms and abbreviations. The focus of my second book, this is yet another topic that lends itself both to the citation of real examples and to humorous coinages, e.g., “One Night Only,” or O NO! and “Tons Of Unread Stuff Lying Everywhere,” or TOUSLE. To distinguish “Facebook friends” from the genuine kind, I suggested we call the former *’quaints*, short for acquaintances. I also pointed out that “Save The Date” is one phrase that should never be abbreviated.

Proverbs. I analyzed the phenomenon of aphorisms and epigrams, both serious and whimsical, and coined some of my own: “There’s nothing worse than unrequited love—except a margin call.” “Stagger your deadlines, or they’ll stagger you.” “Those who worship sacred cows may be dead meat.” “Open a can of worms and you’ll wind up in a fine kettle of fish.”

Bloopers. To “er. . .” is human! I shamelessly borrowed the formula long used by *The New Yorker*, among others: quoting funny typos and other mistakes gleaned from the media and appending clever or snarky retorts. A few samples from 16 such compilations: “*Hamlet* would have been a great play even if it had be typed by a monkey.” (Check the staff.) “Teaching out of the *Basil Reader* is one of the most boring things you can do.” (Not if it’s a cooking class.) “On average, men tend to show greater interest in sex than women.” (In other news, dogs like bones.) “A balaclava is a ski mask. An article about winter workout gear incorrectly referred to baklava.” (It doesn’t work as well.)

Everything else. Whenever I come up with interesting linguistic ideas and observations that don’t fit the above categories, I assemble them into a potpourri of miscellanea, sometimes employing the wry and paradoxical style popularized by George Carlin and Steven Wright. Examples: Why is physical attraction called *chemistry*—instead of physics? Why do we say *thought experiment* when every experiment involves thought? Why is a dismissal invariably described as *unceremonious*—when it’s never likely to be accompanied by a ceremony? Why are collectibles that net huge prices at auction called *ephemera*, when they are far from ephemeral?

So are these really the best? Well, as they say at apiary competitions: You judge the bee!

More seriously, I want to take this opportunity to extend my thanks to Karen and Jeremiah Farrell, *Word Ways* editor-publishers, for keeping the magazine alive for so long and for shepherding it into its new Internet incarnation. I also want to credit the late Ross Eckler, who earlier served as publisher, for 36 years. Future issues of the journal will be available free at digitalcommons.butler.edu/wordways. And because my articles will be online, you’ll find them . . . not off the press!

Credit: The title of this article generated a dozen or so matches. Pete to the bunch!